

# Sentence Basics and Running Away From Run-On Sentences

Look at the following sentence:

**I saw a teacher who cares.**

The author may have wanted to write:

**I saw a teacher. Who cares?**

Using periods (and other forms of punctuation) and knowing when to end a sentence are very important. If you don't end a sentence appropriately, the intended meaning can be changed, or it can be misunderstood. Sometimes the meaning is simply incomprehensible.

When a person learns to write English sentences and compositions, one common problem is writing sentences that are too long. When a sentence ends too quickly, it is called a [sentence fragment](#). When a sentence has too many ideas and runs on too long, it is called a run-on sentence. If you have this problem, don't worry. It is quite easy to fix.

The first thing you need to do is identify when a sentence is a run-on. A run-on (or run-on sentence) is a sentence that really has TWO sentences (or complete ideas) INCORRECTLY combined into one. It is okay to combine two sentences into one, but you must follow some rules.

You might be wondering: "What is a sentence?" A sentence consists of 3 things:

1	subject	the person, place, or thing performing or doing the action
2	verb	the action
3	complete idea	the reader isn't left waiting for another word

Take a look at this sentence:

**I hit the ball.**

**Subject**=I

**Verb**=hit

**Is it a complete idea?** Yes.

Therefore, this is a good sentence.

The ball is a direct object.

Not all sentences require a direct object. For example

**Birds fly.**

**Subject**=birds

**Verb**=fly

**Is it a complete idea?** Yes.

There is no direct object here; however, it is still a complete idea and a good sentence.

Here's another example.

**I take.**

**Subject**=I

**Verb**=take

**Is it a complete idea?** No.

This sentence requires a direct object. (This sentence is called a [sentence fragment](#))

Here's one more example.

**Murray takes the train to school Mom rides the bus.**

**Subject**=Murray AND Mom

**Verb**=takes AND rides

**Is it a complete idea?** It is TWO complete ideas.

This last example is a run-on sentence: Two complete sentences (ideas) incorrectly combined. This sentence lacks signal words which tell the reader when to stop or pause. *A part of a sentence that can be a sentence by itself is called an **independent clause**.* This last example has TWO independent clauses.

## Summary

If you put two sentences (or independent clauses) together without a sufficient amount of signals (commas, semicolons, or connecting words), you have created a run-on.

How do you fix run-ons?

There are four common ways to fix a run-on. Each method is explained below.

### Method #1

**Write the two independent clauses as separate sentences using periods.**

<b>INCORRECT</b>	Carmen loved traveling in Italy she felt Rome was too hot.
<b>CORRECT</b>	Carmen loved traveling in Italy. She felt Rome was too hot.

### Method #2

**Use a semicolon to separate the two independent clauses.**

<b>INCORRECT</b>	Carmen loved traveling in Italy she felt Rome was too hot.
<b>CORRECT</b>	Carmen loved traveling in Italy; she felt Rome was too hot.

### Method #3

**Use a comma and any one of the following connecting words:**

<b>for*</b> <b>and</b> <b>nor</b> <b>but</b>
<b>or</b> <b>yet</b> <b>so**</b>

\*when for means because

\*\*when so means as a result

<b>INCORRECT</b>	Carmen loved traveling in Italy she felt Rome was too hot.
<b>CORRECT</b>	Carmen loved traveling in Italy, but she felt Rome was too hot.

### Method #4

**Use a semicolon and one of the following words:**

therefore, thus, however, consequently,
furthermore, also, nevertheless,

**NOTE: If you use any of these connecting words with method #4, a comma must follow it.**

<b>INCORRECT</b>	Carmen loved traveling in Italy she felt Rome was too hot.
<b>CORRECT</b>	Carmen loved traveling in Italy; however, she felt Rome was too hot.

**NOTE: When using semicolons, the two independent clauses must share a related or common idea. You cannot write the following sentence:**

**Christine loves hot chocolate; I am watching TV.**

**These two clauses are completely unrelated.**

***Practice:***

Directions: The following sentences are all run-ons. Correct them using any of the four methods. There may be more than one correct answer. Write your corrected sentences on a separate piece of paper.

1. The girls played basketball the boys played tennis.
2. Einstein is famous for  $E=mc^2$  Edison is famous for the invention of the light bulb.
3. Titanic is my favorite movie I love eating popcorn.
4. Americans shake hands when they meet the Japanese bow.
5. Mother's Day is always on a Sunday Thanksgiving is always on a Thursday.
6. William loved visiting Montreal Sally preferred just to stay in Quebec.
7. My car broke down I need to buy a new one.
8. At one time few people had enough money to buy books few people could read books.
9. I want to learn Korean Trudy wants to learn Turkish.
10. People love peace they hate war.

## ***Things To Remember!***

1. The above sentences are all examples of two independent clauses forming run-on sentences. Sometimes three or more independent clauses are inappropriately written together, and the result is a very long run-on sentence. We suggest that in these types of situations; use a combination of the above methods. Take a look at the example below.

Orville and Wilbur Wright had a bicycle-making business in Ohio they loved experimenting with flying machines they built the Wright Flyer in 1903.

This sentence is a run-on with three independent clauses. We can use various combinations of the above methods to fix the problem. By applying methods 4 and 1, we get:

Orville and Wilbur Wright had a bicycle-making business in Ohio; however, they loved experimenting with flying machines. They built the Wright Flyer in 1903.

2. **Don't** string several independent clauses together with semicolons. The following example is usually not written, so **DON'T** do it:

Orville and Wilbur Wright had a bicycle-making business in Ohio; they loved experimenting with flying machines; they built the Wright Flyer in 1903.

3. Some people may ask, "Which of the above methods is best?" That answer is not so simple. Sometimes any of the methods are equally correct; at other times, only one or two methods may truly be appropriate for a situation. This knowledge will come as the writer reads a variety of English material.

Also, **don't overuse** any one method. Correctly using different methods often shows good writing. When a person first learns to write, he/she uses method 1 extensively. It is important for the writer to go beyond method 1 and use the other methods. This will show maturity in the author's writing.

1. The girls played basketball the boys played tennis.

Answers:

- The girls played basketball. The boys played tennis.
- The girls played basketball; the boys played tennis.
- The girls played basketball, **but** the boys played tennis.
- The girls played basketball; **however**, the boys played tennis.

2. Einstein is famous for  $E=mc^2$  Edison is famous for the invention of the light bulb.

Answers:

- Einstein is famous for  $E=mc^2$ . Edison is famous for the invention of the light bulb.
- Einstein is famous for  $E=mc^2$ ; Edison is famous for the invention of the light bulb.
- Einstein is famous for  $E=mc^2$ , **but** Edison is famous for the invention of the light bulb.
- Einstein is famous for  $E=mc^2$ ; **however**, Edison is famous for the invention of the light bulb.

3. Titanic is my favorite movie I love eating popcorn.

Answers:

- Titanic is my favorite movie. I love eating popcorn.

This sentence cannot be fixed with the other methods because the two independent clauses do not share similar or related ideas.

4. Americans shake hands when they meet the Japanese bow.

Answers:

- Americans shake hands when they meet. The Japanese bow.
- Americans shake hands when they meet; the Japanese bow.
- Americans shake hands when they meet, **but** the Japanese bow.
- Americans shake hands when they meet; **however**, the Japanese bow.

5. Mother's Day is always on a Sunday Thanksgiving is always on a Thursday.

Answers:

- Mother's Day is always on a Sunday. Thanksgiving is always on a Thursday.
- Mother's Day is always on a Sunday; Thanksgiving is always on a Thursday.
- Mother's Day is always on a Sunday, **and** Thanksgiving is always on a Thursday.
- Mother's Day is always on a Sunday; **however**, Thanksgiving is always on a Thursday.

6. William loved visiting Montreal Sally preferred just to stay in Quebec.

Answers:

- William loved visiting Montreal. Sally preferred just to stay in Quebec.
- William loved visiting Montreal; Sally preferred just to stay in Quebec.
- William loved visiting Montreal, **but** Sally preferred just to stay in Quebec.
- William loved visiting Montreal; **nevertheless**, Sally preferred just to stay in Quebec.

7. My car broke down I need to buy a new one.

Answers:

- My car broke down. I need to buy a new one.
- My car broke down; I need to buy a new one.
- My car broke down, **so** I need to buy a new one.
- My car broke down; **therefore** I need to buy a new one.

8. At one time few people had enough money to buy books few people could read books.

Answers:

- At one time few people had enough money to buy books. Few people could read books.
- At one time few people had enough money to buy books; few people could read books.
- At one time few people had enough money to buy books, **and** few people could read books.
- At one time few people had enough money to buy books; **also**, few people could read books.

9. I want to learn Korean Trudy wants to learn Turkish.

Answers:

- I want to learn Korean. Trudy wants to learn Turkish.
- I want to learn Korean; Trudy wants to learn Turkish.
- I want to learn Korean, **and** Trudy wants to learn Turkish.
- I want to learn Korean; **however**, Trudy wants to learn Turkish.

10. People love peace they hate war.

Answers:

- People love peace. They hate war.
- People love peace; they hate war.
- People love peace, **but** they hate war.

People love peace; **however**, they hate war.